

Report of the Director of City Strategy

Bus Information Service Provision

Summary

1. This report details alternative service provision for the Bus Information Service (Businfo) following the decision at Budget Council (01/03/06) to close the office, that operated from 20 George Hudson Street. The report recommends adoption of the alternative proposals for service provision.

Background

2. Under the Provisions of the Transport Act 2000 there is a requirement for the Council to determine the level of local bus information to be provided and how it should be made available. It is regarded by many local authorities as good practice to provide the information and the Department for Transport's 'Full Guidance on Local Transport Plans' suggests use of 'marketing and transport information services' to deliver progress on the 'shared priorities.' Furthermore, the Council is involved in key partnerships that include the provision of bus information.
3. The Yorkshire Traveline is a regional partnership that co-ordinates the telephone answering service (0870 608 2608) and the internet journey planning services, as well as co-ordinating the data behind these information systems. The York bus information service, handles local telephone enquiries relating to queries about bus services in York, although when the telephones are busy or the office not staffed, these telephone calls are diverted to another regional information service (East Yorkshire Motor Services (EYMS)) in Hull. The service in George Hudson Street is also a walk-in centre for providing information and issue of bus passes.
4. The Transport Act empowers local authorities to provide bus information if this is not provided adequately by bus operators, and to recover the cost of doing so. However, actions to progress all issues affecting bus services (including bus information) are established through the Quality Bus Partnership (QBP), which is a quarterly meeting between the bus operators and the Council. The group is independently chaired and the agenda and minutes resourced by the Council's Transport Planning unit. Attempts to seek financial support from the bus operators to provide the bus information service, were unsuccessful.

5. The Council has traditionally led on the provision of bus information by providing a dedicated team of staff and resources to answer telephone enquiries (York 551400). The bus information team at George Hudson Street office also provided other functions :-
 - Issuing concessionary bus passes and tokens for older citizens, disabled citizens
 - Young peoples YOZone cards.
 - Staff Park and Ride passes (any changes regarding issue of passes will .be brought forward after consultation with unions)
 - Hosting the Dial & Ride booking service.
 - Taking bookings for the Wigglybus service.
 - Distribution of bus timetables.
 - Face-to-face bus information enquiries. This aspect of the service will cease.
 - Handling email enquiries.
 - Information on temporary service changes, for example: details of bus route diversions and special information for events such as race days.
 - Additional information on other sustainable transport alternatives.
 - Providing information and support to Council officers to assist in the efficient use of the transport network
6. As part of the budget savings for 2006/7 the current bus information service office was closed on the 1st June 2006. The cost, to the Council, of providing the bus information service in 2005/06 was £107,000. To achieve budget savings the budget available in 2006/07 is £52,000 reducing to £37,000 in 2007/08.
7. A target date for the closure of Businfo office was set for 1st September 2006 to allow sufficient time for an alternative way of delivering the service to be researched and implemented. However, the closure was brought forward to the 1st June 2006, with the service at the Businfo office ceasing at the end of the working day on 31st May 2006. This was due to increasing difficulties in ensuring service is maintained as Businfo staff seek alternative employment in advance of the initial target closure date.
8. It was expected to present the options for the alternative provision of Businfo services to the Executive prior to its closure. However, due to the time required to fully assess the complexities of how the service is delivered, and identify and address the numerous issues arising from securing an alternative way of providing the services it has unfortunately been delayed. This includes addressing staffing issues which have been further hampered by the resistance of some staff to the closure.

Consultation

9. The decision to close the service was progressed through Planning and Transport EMAP, Executive and Full Council. Details of the closure plans were requested as part of that process.

Options and Analysis

Telephone Enquiries

10. It is estimated that approximately 6250 (average.) telephone enquiries are made to the York Businfo office each month. Approximately 4,350 of these arise from calls to the local bus information telephone no. (551400). The remaining calls arise from enquiries to the Yorkshire Traveline.
11. Due to the short timescales involved in the closure of the office, the existing arrangements with EYMS on Traveline have been extended to include 551400 calls until November 2006. The IT requirements to transfer 551400 calls directly to Hull have now been completed. Monitoring of the telephone enquiries from 1st June will take place to gauge the level of service received.
12. As staff leave and take up other posts, it was necessary to reduce the opening hours of the York Businfo office in the evening and at week ends. Reduced staffing levels have also meant that an increasing number of calls to 551400 have been transferred to EYMS from 1st April 2006 to maintain the existing level of service.
13. From the 1st June 2006, following the closure of the Businfo office, three options are available for providing public transport information; these being:
 - i) Retain the local Businfo contact telephone no. and transfer enquiries automatically to the regional 'Traveline' travel information office in Hull, operated by EYMS. For this option, the calls will be closely monitored and the measures will be reviewed prior to November 2006 to allow officers time to progress the tendering of the service for the long term provision of telephone enquiries.
 - ii) Retain the local Businfo contact telephone no and provide voicemail / answerphone giving callers contact details for national 'Traveline' and local bus operators.
 - iii) Remove all references to the local Businfo contact telephone no. (551400) on bus stop flags etc. and replace with the national 'Traveline' contact telephone no. and website address.
14. For all of the above options the Council will be required to continue to contribute financially towards the operation of the regional travel information office. Based on the proportion of traveline enquiries from the York area in relation to the total number of enquiries received. However, as option i) diverts a significant number of 551400 calls a discounted contribution rate for enquires using the traveline

number has been extended to November 2006. The continuance of a discounted contribution is being pursued.

15. Each of the options has advantages and disadvantages in relation to costs and the likely risk impacts. These are described in the 'implications' section.
16. Issuing of printed information such as timetables following enquiries, cannot be continued in any of the three options.

Handling email enquiries and other remote enquiries

17. Email enquiries on bus information timetables will no longer be available. The introduction of new technologies means that it is now possible to obtain more information through the internet and mobile phone text messaging. The Council, through its existing transport planning staff, is continually improving these services. In addition, dedicated 'City Space' electronic travel information and ticketing kiosks have been installed at four key locations in the City. These are available to use 24 hours a day and are currently being trialled. It is expected that, subject to satisfactory performance, more kiosks will be installed at various locations throughout the city. It may also be possible, in future, to service email and other remote enquiries through developments of easy@york or a contractual relationship with a regional travel information centre. It is proposed to work towards a long term solution to this issue.
18. The responsibility for dealing with remote enquiries in the future will be through the individual bus companies operating in York. The Council will work through the QBP to ensure that we maximise publicity of this service with the operators.
19. The internet is a major information resource that may, at present, be underutilised. Bus operators will, also through the QBP, become responsible for including high quality information about bus services on their individual web-sites. The National Traveline website (www.traveline.org.uk) provides links to regional travel centres, regional Traveline sites (e.g. www.yorkshiretravel.net) and the Transport direct web-site (www.transportdirect.info).

Issuing of Concessionary Travel Passes and Cards

20. Whilst the majority of older persons concessionary bus passes are currently issued at the Guildhall during March and April, the remainder of the concessionary passes are issued at the Bus Information Office, throughout the remainder of the year. Typically before the introduction of free travel for older persons about 190 new and renewed bus passes were dealt with by the Bus Information team each month. With the introduction of free travel for older persons, there has been a significant increase in the number of passes issued and for the period 24th April – 12th May, nearly 300 passes per week (average) have been issued. This is expected to reduce as the year progresses and will continue to be monitored. Costs are covered from the concessionary travel budget.
21. It is proposed that, in the short term, staff will be in attendance at Reception at the Council's Office in 9 St Leonard's Place, during normal office hours

(8.30 to 5.00 Monday to Friday) to provide this service. In the longer term it is anticipated that Parking Services staff will perform this function in the same office.

22. The training of staff and provision of administrative material to support the service is in progress.
23. The database of passes and co-ordination of the service would remain within the Transport Planning Unit. Postal applications for passes would be transferred to Parking Services staff.

YOZone cards

24. About 700 YOZone cards are issued each year with a peak in demand around the school summer holiday period.
25. Through the Quality Bus Partnership bus operators in York have agreed in principle to extending the YOZone card to young people up to the age of 18. This is expected to lead to a greater demand for the pass in the future.
26. It is proposed that, in the short term, staff will be in attendance at Reception at the Council's Office in 9 St Leonard's Place, during normal Office hours (8.30 to 5.00 Monday to Friday) to provide this service. In the longer term it is anticipated that Parking Services staff will perform this function in the same office.
27. To ease the pressure on the Parking Services staff, the Transport Planning Unit will hold Roadshows at education establishments to encourage young people to renew and be issued with their cards at the place of their study.

Staff Park and Ride Passes

28. It has been agreed that the renewal of the staff park and ride passes will be carried out at the Park and Ride sites (Askham Bar, Monks Cross, Grimston and Rawcliffe Bar). This arrangement is already in place and Council staff have been informed of this as a permanent arrangement.

Dial and Ride

29. As a temporary measure, the continued use of part of the present Businfo office space will be used, during the vacancy notice period, to accommodate the Dial & Ride Booking service. However, the enhanced telephone answering service, stipulated under the Service Level Agreement, can no longer be staffed because of the loss of the Businfo officer who performed this function. To cover this, in the short term, a telephone messaging phone service has been provided. In addition an emergency contact number will be provided for those occasions when either a booking error or practical problems lead to a customer not being picked up. The longer term arrangements will need to be resolved to ensure the correct functioning of the Service Level Agreement for Dial and Ride services.
30. Publicity began in May to advise customers that Dial and Ride bookings can only be taken between the hours of 9 to 12, Monday to Friday.

Wigglybus

31. The Wigglybus is a demand responsive bus service to assist accessibility into the rural areas of York.
32. Bookings are taken by the Bus Information staff up to 5pm before the day of travel (Saturday for Monday journeys). For the period 1st June – 30th June this service will temporarily be transferred to the Transport Planning Unit.

Distribution of timetables

33. Printed information have been provided to as many customers as possible through outlets around the city. This includes Council owned buildings such as libraries and receptions.
34. Bus operators have agreed in principle to this and are willing to supply timetables and assistance if required for distribution. This will need effective management and coordination between the Council's Transport Planning Unit and the bus operators. Investigations and negotiations into providing information through a number of council outlets or post offices are currently underway.
35. The Tourist Information Centres will continue to distribute public transport information to attractions within the City, but will not provide any enhanced service.
36. City of York Council staff will undertake a quality control check of information at bus stops over the summer of 2006 to ensure up to date timetables are in use.

Face to face enquiries.

37. The bus information office received a large number of enquiries face-to-face (approximately 2000 customers per month entering the office). This service can no longer be provided. Enquiries have been made with the easy@york service but face-to-face customer services will be a later phase of the project, due to be delivered in 2010.
38. The development and application of new information communication technology (ICT) to provide other means of satisfying enquiries is a part of the smarter choices strategy of the LTP and will be progressed. This includes use of the internet, mobile phones and dedicated automated kiosks.

Information on temporary service changes

39. Staff at the bus information office processed temporary diversions caused by roadworks or events. This included liaising with operators and posting temporary stop information. This information was then used to inform telephone callers.
40. The Council will continue to co-ordinate notification of street closures but informing customers (including the regional traveline office) of the practical service changes will be the responsibility of the individual bus operators.

Additional Information on sustainable travel alternatives

41. The QBP will endeavour to provide up to date bus information at bus stops. The Council's Transport Planning Unit is continuing to develop the provision of additional sustainable travel information as part of the Council's smarter choices strategy.

Publicity

42. A press release was issued regarding the closure of the office. Officers have been in discussion with the Marketing and Communications team on how to publicise the closure of the service and how information can be accessed in the future. This was carried out by the following :-
 - Notices in the Bus Information Office.
 - Purchasing space in the Evening Press with a special information page.
 - On the Councils web site.
 - Your City and other Council newsletters.
 - Publicity on buses, as agreed with bus operators.

Corporate Objectives

43. The actions and proposals contained in this report will meet the agreed budget savings approved by Full Council. The service continues to contribute to the following Corporate Aims:
 - **Corporate Aim 6: Ensure that all council services are accessible and inclusive, and build strong proud local communities.**
 - This proposal would contribute to making best use of national and regional travel information services augmented by future long-term integration with the easy@york service and the use of technological innovation to deliver accessible and reliable information
 - **Corporate Aim 8: Transform City of York Council into an excellent customer focused 'can-do' authority.**
 - This proposal would enable the Council to make best use of national and regional travel information services augmented by future integration with the easy@york service and the use of technological innovation to deliver accessible and reliable information, whilst ensuring value for money. It also enacts the savings as agreed at Budget Council on 01/03/06.

Implications

- **Financial**

44. The budget for Bus info totalled £107k in 2005/06. The reductions agreed as part of the budget process reduces this to £52k in 2006/07 and £37k in 2007/08.
45. The three options proposed for the Businfo service are as follows
- i) Retain the local Businfo contact telephone no. and transfer enquiries automatically to the regional 'Traveline' travel information office in Hull, operated by EYMS. For this option, the calls will be closely monitored and the measures will be reviewed prior to November 2006. to allow officers time to progress the tendering of the service for the long term provision of telephone enquiries.
 - ii) Retain the local Businfo contact telephone no and provide voicemail / answerphone giving callers contact details for national 'Traveline' and local bus operators.
 - iii) Remove all references to the local Businfo contact telephone no. (551400) on bus stop flags etc. and replace with the national 'Traveline' contact telephone no. and website address.

46. The detailed costings are shown in Annex A and summarised below

	Option i (£'000)		Option ii (£'000)		Option iii (£'000)	
	Cost	Budget	Cost	Budget	Cost	Budget
2006/07	63.5	52.0	64.2	52.0	73.5	52.0
2007/08	38.8	37.0	37.3	37.0	37.3	37.0

47. Members will note that the three options are affordable in future years – option i) being the most expensive of £1.8k over budget. This level of additional cost can be contained within Transport Planning budgets. The three options do however show overspends in 2006/07 totalling c £12k for options i) and ii) and £21.5k for option iii). The difference in the costs is that option iii) will require all bus flags to be altered.
48. The greater part of the costs for the closure of the information service is estimated is for updating the information at bus stop flags etc. and reprinting information that directly refers to the bus information office (such as YOZone Cards).
49. The overspend in 2006/07 will be reported to the City Strategy EMAP as part of the ongoing financial monitoring reports the first of which will be taken in September. It is anticipated at this time the overspend will be contained within the City Strategy budget

- **Human Resources (HR)**

50. These actions and proposals have reduced the number of staff by 5 full time equivalents (6 employees). The City's management of change policy which outline the Council's procedure for dealing with redundancy and redeployment have been

applied. Of these 5 staff, 4 were made redundant with a total redundancy payment of £8.5k that was funded from the corporate redundancy budget. The procedure takes into account statutory obligations for consultation, measures for minimising the impact of redundancy and observance of fair selection criteria.

51. It should be noted the some of the duties currently carried out by the bus information team will be absorbed by the Transport Planning and Parking Services teams. This may result in additional work that cannot be absorbed by those teams without affecting service delivery in other areas. This will be monitored by the respective Heads of Services.

- **Equalities**

52. The closure of this service has a particular consequence on disabled and older people. These equalities issues will need to be considered through an equalities impact assessment and in consultation with the affected groups. The results of this assessment will need to inform the decision about how these services are provided in the future

- **Legal**

53. The proposals contained in this report comply with the requirements of the Transport Act 2000 concerning the provision of information about bus services. There are no other legal implications arising from this report

- **Crime and Disorder**

54. There are no implications.

- **Information Technology (IT)**

55. There are significant IT improvements required to provide fully accessible, up to date and reliable information.

- **Property**

56. There are no implications.

- **Other**

57. None Identified

Risk Management

58. The assessment of risks associated with the recommendation is contained in Annex B and summarised below.

59. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified are those that may reduce customers desire to use public transport contrary to the transport strategy in the local transport plan (Strategic), a

disjointed services (Operational), and maintain the quality and consistency of information (Reputational). In addition the estimated savings predicted at Council Budget may not be fully realised as a result of the continued contribution to the traveline service and one-off closure expenses (Financial).

- 60. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, the risk score for all of these has been assessed at 16 or above, placing it in the HIGH category. An action plan (see mitigation measures column in table at Annexe B) has been devised to reduce the risk to at least MEDIUM, and if practicable, LOW within 12 months, with lead responsibility assigned to Julie Hurley.
- 61. The management of these risks provides the council with the opportunity to provide more effective services to all council customers. All of the options presented affect the way that customers are able to obtain travel information. Option i) causes the minimum amount of disruption to customers and minimises the one-off costs for the Council in closing the Businfo office.

Recommendations

- 62. It is recommended that the Executive approves the actions taken and those proposed in paragraphs 10 to 42 of this report.
- 63. The Executive are recommended to adopt Option i) for telephone enquiries and retain the local contact phone number (551400) and divert calls to the 'Traveline' regional travel office in Hull at no extra cost to the customer.

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Report Approved **Date**

Report Approved **Date** *Insert Date*

Wards Affected: All wards affected

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None

Annexes

Annexe A Financial Implications
Annexe B Risk Assessment

**Annexe A
Financial Implications**

Option i) - Closure of Businfo, and transfer calls to Traveline Hull.

<u>2006/07 Expenditure</u>		<u>Cost</u>	<u>Budget</u>
		<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>
Staffing	Costs to 31 st May	13.0	
Publicity	Leaflets Redesign	5.0	
	Printing Costs	0.2	
	Distribution Costs	1.0	
	Advertising	0.8	
Closure Costs	Removal and storage	1.0	
IT Costs	Network Costs	0.3	
Accommodation	Admin Buildings	7.4	
Regional Travel Centre	Contribution to EYMS Regional Travel Centre	21.5	
Traveline Journey Planner	Contribution to Regional Web based journey Planner	13.3	
	Total 2006-07 Expenditure	63.5	52.0

<u>Future Years</u>		<u>Cost</u>	<u>Budget</u>
		<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>
Regional Travel Centre	Contribution to EYMS Regional Travel Centre	25.5	
Traveline Journey Planner	Contribution to Regional Web based journey Planner	13.3	
	Total Recurring Costs	38.8	37.0

Annex A
Financial Implications

Option ii) - Closure of Businfo, and provide answerphone/voicemail service to advise callers of other contact numbers.

<u>2006/07</u>		<u>Cost</u>	<u>Budget</u>
<u>Expenditure</u>		<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>
Staffing	Costs to 31 st May	13.0	
Publicity	Leaflets Redesign	5.0	
	Printing Costs	0.2	
	Distribution Costs	1.0	
	Advertising	0.8	
Closure Costs	Removal and storage	1.0	
IT Costs	Provision of voicemail service	1.0	
Accommodation	Admin Buildings	7.4	
Regional Travel Centre	Contribution to EYMS Regional Travel Centre	21.5	
Traveline Journey Planner	Contribution to Regional Web based journey Planner	13.3	
	Total 2006-07 Expenditure	64.2	52.0

Future Years		Cost	Budget
		£'000	£'000
Regional Travel Centre	Contribution to EYMS Regional Travel Centre	24.0	
Traveline Journey Planner	Contribution to Regional Web based journey Planner	13.3	
	Total Recurring Costs	37.3	37.0

Annex A
Financial Implications

Option iii) - Closure of Businfo, and transfer calls to Traveline Hull.

<u>2006/07</u> <u>Expenditure</u>		<u>Cost</u>	<u>Budget</u>
		<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>
Staffing	Costs to 31 st May	13.0	
Publicity	Leaflets Redesign	5.0	
	Printing Costs	0.2	
	Distribution Costs	1.0	
	Advertising	0.8	
	Update bus flag contact info	10.0	
Closure Costs	Removal and storage	1.0	
IT Costs	Provision of voicemail service	0.3	
Accommodation	Admin Buildings	7.4	
Regional Travel Centre	Contribution to EYMS Regional Travel Centre	21.5	
Traveline Journey Planner	Contribution to Regional Web based journey Planner	13.3	
	Total 2006-07 Expenditure	73.5	52.0

<u>Future Years</u>		<u>Cost</u>	<u>Budget</u>
		<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>
Regional Travel Centre	Contribution to EYMS Regional Travel Centre	24.0	
Traveline Journey Planner	Contribution to Regional Web based journey Planner	13.3	
	Total Recurring Costs	37.3	37.0

Risk Implications of Options i, ii, and iii for providing an alternative service after closure of the Businfo office

Type	Score	Description	Mitigation Measures
Strategic	20	The effects of changing the service delivery impacts upon the use of public transport in the city contrary to the Local Transport Plan Strategy	Ensure that the service provided is of the highest standard possible and any issues that arise are dealt with quickly so that confidence is maintained.
Operational	16	The disaggregation of the service to other providers and the bus companies may result in a disjointed service for customers.	Publicise where information can be obtained and ensure effective partnerships are in place to provide sufficient correct information
Finance	20	The recommendations pose the potential risk of anticipated savings not being realised, particularly option iii.	Look for other efficiency savings to compensate
Organisation / Reputation	16	The recommendations are highly dependent on the cooperation and performance of partner organisations in the public/private sector and proper functioning of technology. DfT monitor the provision of bus information on a regional basis any fall in standards could affect our reputation with DfT.	Develop and maintain high quality partnerships